The “Now” and the “How” of Salvation

Introduction:

No word of Scripture is unimportant, the verbs, the nouns, adjectives, adverbs. The little words may seem not to matter, but they are important too.

The connectives in Scripture set the scene for the larger words to play their part. “Wherefore” draws a conclusion from the previous section.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. He became a man, lived as a man and was obedient to death – even the death on a cross. God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name, above every name. One day, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess, “LORD JESUS CHRIST.” Therefore, work out your own salvation. (2:5)

Another little word is the word “now” νῦν.

Salvation has Three Tenses

Past Salvation – From the Penalty of Sin -- “By Grace you have been saved through faith.” (Eph. 2:8)

Future Salvation - From the Presence of Sin -- “our salvation nearer than when we first believed.” (Rom. 13:11). Paul is speaking in this passage not about the Past or the future but about the present salvation.

He says, “now, much more in my absence…”

Present Salvation - From the Power of Sin -- “work out your own salvation” (Phil. 2:12)

Paul is writing to believers, not to unbelievers. Unbelievers cannot, and should not be told to live the Christian life. You might as well tell the Israelites to enter into Canaan before God had brought them out of Egypt through the Red Sea.

You can’t live the Christian life, until you have the Christian life to live. This is what the present salvation looks like, according to Phil. 2.

I. A Present Model – Jesus Christ

1. He is the Emancipator

He is the One Who set us free. He brought us through our “Red Sea” experience and now tells us to possess the land of the Christian life.

B. He is the Example

When Peter says that He was, “leaving us an example that you should follow His steps", I Peter 2:21, remember that the "us", and the "you", are believers; and only they can they be followers.

C. He is the Enabler

God’s commands are His enabling. When He gives a command, He supplies the ability. He never gives a command that the believer, trusting him, cannot fulfill.

II. A Present Mandate – 2:12a

"Ye have always obeyed . . . in my presence . . . now much more in my absence" When Paul says, “obeyed” he is speaking of obeying God, not himself. But now he is far away In Rome. They are still in good hands, the hands of their example, Jesus Christ.

III. A Present Mission – 2:12b

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

 A. A Great Present Is Conferred on Us

“your own salvation”

1. It is His Salvation Before it is Yours.

God decided to offer salvation in the Garden of Eden. He could have destroyed Adam and Eve and started over.

In David’s penitent prayer he prayed, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,”

"Shew forth His salvation from day to day," (Psalm 96:2)

As Guy King put it:

 He purposed it by His sovereign Grace.

 He planned it from before the foundation of the world.

 He procured it at Calvary.

 He proffered it for man’s acceptance.

 He pressed it by the continual influence of the Holy Spirit and His written Word.

2. It became "your own" when you stretched forth the hand of faith to receive it as your own and it became eternally yours.

* It buries the past
* Changes the present
* Ensures the future

What a wonderful gift of love!

B. A Great Program is Now Set Before Us

"work out" - κατεργάζεσθε – work out the salvation that God has worked into your life.

You have a perfect standing with God,

2 Cor. 5:21

“For ﻿﻿He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become ﻿﻿the righteousness of God in Him.”

Now, bring your state up to your standing. It is a progressive work of God in the life of the believer. We will never bring the two positions together in this life, but the work must continue. One day we will arrive at that perfection, when we see Him as He is.

I John 3:2

“we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for ﻿﻿we shall see Him as He is.”

So, seeing Christ will bring perfection to us. I think that I see a principal here: The more we see of Christ, the more we will be like Him. That means that we don’t have to wait until heaven to be more like Him. We can become more and more like Him here and now.

2 Cor. 3:18

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding ﻿﻿as in a mirror ﻿﻿the glory of the Lord, ﻿﻿are being transformed {see Rom. 12:2} into the same image from glory to glory, just as ﻿﻿by the Spirit of the Lord.”

C. A Great Peril Indicated

"with fear and trembling."

This fear and trembling is certainly not “lest we lose our salvation.” We must be like the little boy who said, “I do what my father says, not because I’m afraid he will hurt me, but because I’m afraid I will hurt him.”

Don’t think that you could not fail. Greater men and women than you have failed.

In the O.T. we think of the man who “walked with God”, Abraham, and the man “after God’s own heart”, David. At times, they failed; David especially so.

In the N.T Peter comes to mind. Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are ﻿﻿made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” Jesus said to him, ﻿﻿“Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

All of this leads us to this conclusion:

A Warning: "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12)

A Promise: "Unto Him that is able to keep you from stumbling, And ﻿﻿to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,” (Jude 24)

IV. A Present Means – 2:13

"For it is God that works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"

A. It Satisfies God

“His good pleasure”

We were created for God’s pleasure. After six days of creating, God looked at everything He had created, including man and woman, and said that it was very good. (Gen. 1:30)

Even after the fall, man can still please God. In Heb. 11:5 we read that Enoch pleased God. He was not alone.

Numerous men and women are said to have pleased God in that “Hall of Faith” chapter - How did they do it? – “By faith”.

That phrase occurs at least 18 times in Hebrews 11. But, that chapter begins by saying, “without faith it is impossible to please God” (11:6)

What is Faith? - Simply taking God at His word.

B. It Suits You

“both to will and to do”

The two things that keep men from pleasing God, not doing what we know to do and not being willing to do it.

1. It will Fix Your “doer”

I will serve God when I get around to it. We find that other things grab or attention. The “here and now” crowd out the “then and there”

2. It will Fix Your “willer”

We need to be made willing. God will work in us if we allow Him to do so.

Before your conversion God worked on you by the Holy Spirit. Now he works in you by that same Spirit. Every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. (Rom. 8:9)

Many of the Corinthians were unaware of this fact. They were living back in some of their old heathen habits. He had taught them better, so he had to remind them with these words: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Cor. 6:19)

Conclusion:

What is the “now” and the “how” of salvation?

The “now” is the present time. You can’t do anything yesterday.

Likewise, you can’t do anything tomorrow. Today is the only day you will ever have to do anything for the Lord.

With all of the uncertainties in the world, how are you going to get anything done?

Speaking of the uncertainties of life in Ecclesiastes, Solomon summed up the entire situation with the words of our first hymn: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: ﻿﻿Fear God and keep His commandments,”

I.e. Trust and obey. Truly, there is no other way to be happy in Jesus.